

NEW BOOKS.

Is Man Capable of a Future Life?

It is at least an interesting hypothesis which is put forward in the book entitled "The Evolution of Immortality," by S. D. McConnell, D.D., D.C.L. (Macmillan). The author's aim is not so much to demonstrate as to suggest the possible validity of a new hypothesis, to indicate some ground for thinking that, while all human beings are not immortal, some of them, under certain conditions, are capable of a life beyond the grave, which, however, will not be endless, but will be subject to definite conditions of its own. Dr. McConnell admits that we cannot conceive of physical activity in the absence of a material vestment, but he submits that the matter with which the soul may be associated in a future existence need not be, and in truth cannot be, the same kind of matter with which it is associated in the present life. He is disposed to find the physical garment of souls as are able to outlive their mortal environment in the strange substance known as the luminiferous or interstellar ether, the medium through which the "X-Ray" and wireless telegraphy perform their work. We are told that a material medium fills all space and interpenetrates all that we call matter. The experiments made by Struve, Helmholtz, Lord Kelvin, Dolbear, Tesla, Hertz and a hundred other mathematicians and physicists, have demonstrated its existence and to a considerable extent thrown light upon its nature. The result has been to compel a new definition of matter. Extension, ponderability, form, dimension and such qualities can no longer be thought sufficient to define matter. We can no longer speak of "empty" space, for no portion of space is empty. We can no longer assert that two portions of matter can occupy the same space at the same time, for they do so constantly. It seems, indeed, to be a condition of the existence of the matter which we see that it should be bathed in a matter which we do not see. That the universal ether is matter may be pronounced undisputed. It has been weighed and measured. A sphere of it, the size of the earth, would, if compressed to the density of the earth, be in size somewhere between a marble and an orange. As Lord Kelvin has proved, the universal ether exhibits in some ways the phenomena of a highly tenuous fluid. In others, that of an infinitely dense solid, and in still others, the properties of a jelly. It is the medium through which light moves by waves of an ascertained length; electric energy by waves of a different length; heat by waves of still another length; and the energy which we call gravitation by some means not yet ascertained.

Again, it is the medium in the orange flash through which the invisible rays of light pass to form an X-ray photograph. Its waves flow through so dense a mass of matter as a block of glass, as water flows through a sieve. If, then, asks Dr. McConnell, the universal ether be a medium in which the elemental energies of heat, light, electricity and, possibly, chemical energy, do their work, may not vital energy be concerned with it as well? Here we are reminded that about twenty years ago two eminent men of science in Great Britain, Prof. Balfour Stewart and Prof. P. G. Tait, put forth hesitantly a theory of a physical basis of a future life, starting from the evident double truth that all physical activity is associated with molecular activity in the matter of the brain and nerves, while, at the same time, physical and psychical phenomena are evidently different things, they suggest that there may be a future life, a third something which serves as the nexus between them, and that etherial matter may be such a *tertium quid*.

The author of this book goes on to elaborate in detail his hypothesis. He reminds us that each thought we think, each motion we feel, is accompanied by certain molecular movements and rearrangements in the brain. The psychical activity actually builds up a physical fabric for itself. This material fabric, however, is every moment disintegrating and is death falls into ruin. "Suppose," says Dr. McConnell, "that before this ruin befalls, the soul shall have been able to build up, as it were, a form within the brain, a body within the body, something like that which the Orientals have for ages spoken of as the 'astral body.' Then, when the body of flesh shall have crumbled away, there will have been left a body, material to be sure, but composed of a kind of matter

which behaves quite differently from that which our senses perceptions deal with. This new body would be formed of a material the ether, which, so far as science has anything to say about it, is essentially indestructible. It would move freely among and through ordinary matter without let or hindrance. Our author deems it not difficult to form a picture of a life under such conditions. "From the individual spirits of just men made perfect this present 'muddy vestment of decay' has dropped away, leaving them 'not unclothed, but clothed upon.' They are still men. They have rational souls with material bodies, fit to sustain and to express their psychical life. The matter of their bodies is obedient to the laws of matter and life, but to the laws of that kind of life and matter. 'There are celestial bodies and bodies terrestrial,' and each has its own modes of action. Such ethereal bodies compacted with living souls would of necessity inhabit a universe of their own, even though that universe should occupy the same space that this one does. Neither earth nor fire nor water could in the least impede their movements. In frost and flames they would be equally at home. With the swiftness of light or gravitation they could speed from where old Bontes leads his leach to where Sagittarius draws his bow in the south." Dr. McConnell goes on to argue that "with bodies of such fine stuff compounded and so plastic to the uses of the spirit their knowledge would expand until nature's secrets should be open to their eyes. Their senses would be so acute and delicately balanced as to be capable of thrills of pleasure so transcendent and of pain so poignant that the experience of this present life probably gives us no comparison to estimate them by. Love could have its perfect fulfillment. In the present stage of existence no personality ever knows really very much of any other. Each is shut within a body which, at the best, can only partially reveal it. Each living soul can but make itself known and can gain knowledge of another only through physical media which are limited by the qualities of the matter which composes them. The mind is continually welched down and retarded by the thousand ills that flesh is heir to. Our author, however, has no doubt that the ethereal body, also, is subject to its own ills. 'But being in close relation to the psychical life, and immeasurably better fitted for being the vehicle for its expression, knowledge and love must have opened to them possibilities, not infinite, indeed, but so extended that we may not even try to guess their limits.'"

Dr. McConnell by no means avers that all human beings are capable of a life beyond the grave. The condition of such an existence, he suggests, the previous attainment of self-consciousness, moral sensibility, of that faculty which we call conscience, and which feels the sense of obligation to other personalities. "Until moral sensibility becomes self-consciousness, all question of personal immortality is irrelevant, because there is, accurately speaking, no personality to become immortal. Up to that point the individual living creature, whether in human form or not, falls short of the essential personality for which eternal life can have any meaning." Only for those persons who possess the requisite moral vigor is the transit from one stage of existence to another possible. It by no means follows that all who are capable of a future life must have attained in this life to the same degree of moral excellence. Future life, to be personal life at all, to involve consciousness and memory, must be continuous with that which now is. One must begin again where he leaves off. This implies, however, the passage into the other life of men at all stages of moral development, provided only that they have been developed far enough in every case to make the transit possible. "The law of growth and progress, with the concomitant possibility of degeneration and death, must be carried over with them, and must hold wherever living creatures are. One may not affirm that the future life is an 'endless' one for those who attain it any more than this one is. It has its own law of being and no universe of every law is a penalty and the ultimate penalty everywhere is annihilation. The power of moral choice must remain."

Continued on Eighth Page.

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